



**Sample Pages from
The Anniversary**

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COMMEDIA CHEKHOV

THE ANNIVERSARY
THE PROPOSAL
THE BEAR

THREE SHORT COMEDIES ADAPTED BY
Lindsay Price
FROM THE ORIGINALS BY
Anton Chekhov



Commedia Chekhov

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Characters

The Anniversary

Andrey Andreyevitch Shipuchin: Chairman of the Norvik Joint Stock Bank.

Tatiana Alexeyevna: His wife.

Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin: The bank's bookkeeper.

Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina: A persistent woman.

Deputation of Shareholders of the Bank: Extremely satisfied with the bank.

The Proposal

Svetlana Milailovna Chubukov: A landowning widow.

Natalya Stepanovna: Her daughter.

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov: A nervous neighbour of Chubukov.

The Bear

Elena Ivanovna Popova: A landowning widow.

Grigory Stepanovitch Smirnov: A landowner.

Ludmilla: Popova's housekeeper.

Casting

It is the expectation of the author that this group of characters can and should be played by a diverse group of actors. Do not assume the characters are white or cisgendered. Cast the actor who connects to the character's intention. Period. Don't get bogged down in gender as presented in the source material. A wide variety of actors played all the roles in the original workshop and it worked just fine.

Sets

See the set description at the beginning of each play.

Costumes

It is the intention of the author that these plays are not necessarily set in the 19th century nor should they match the original source material. Costumes should be chosen to best reflect the characters and their personalities. The characters are physical and exaggerated, so use this as a foundation.

There are characters who mention specific costume pieces – Elena Ivanovna in *The Bear* is in mourning and wearing all-black, Natalya in *The Proposal* talks about wearing an apron and Ivan Vassilevitch is dressed as if going to a New Year’s Eve party. A list of mentioned costume pieces is in the Appendix.

Name Pronunciations

See the Pronunciation guide in the Appendix.

Accents

It is neither required nor suggested that anyone speak with a Russian accent.

Timing

If doing all three plays, put your intermission after *The Proposal*.

Introduction

Why is this play called *Commedia Chekhov*?

This collection adapts three one-act plays by Anton Chekhov, a late 19th-century Russian playwright known for his realistic comedies and dramas, and blends them with the highly physical acting style of *Commedia dell'Arte*. These two styles might seem at odds with each other. Chekhov often explored themes of failed ideas, the breakdown of aristocratic society, class structure, and loss. In contrast, *Commedia dell'Arte* features exaggerated physical comedy, such as a Zanni character comically eating their shoe out of hunger.

As a writing challenge, I wanted to explore both worlds and discover how they fit together. Surprisingly, there is a lot of overlap. Where do they align? Can Chekhov be played through the lens of *Commedia*? It has been a great experience, and I hope you feel the same!

Do you need to have an extended knowledge of *Commedia* to stage these plays? No. Does it help? Sure!

Commedia dell'Arte is an improvised comedic theatre form that flourished in Italy in the 1500s. The exact origins of *Commedia dell'Arte* are hard to pin down, with little documentation prior to the 16th century. The term “*Commedia dell'Arte*” itself wasn’t commonly used until the 18th century. It is generally acknowledged that the form solidified in Italy in the 1550s and reached its peak in the 1650s. Despite its opaque history, the elements that define *Commedia* are clear: improvised performances based on scenarios, where actors work from a basic outline and make up their lines.

- **Stock Characters** – Character types in *Commedia dell'Arte* are divided into masters (*vecchi*), servants (*zanni*), and lovers. The characters remain consistent, with only the situations changing. They have the same attitude, appearance, drive, and physical actions throughout. Although the stories are improvised, the characters behave the same way in any situation.
- **Limited Themes** – Love, money, and food form the basis of almost every scenario in *Commedia dell'Arte*. These themes are closely tied to the characters’ needs and drives.
- **Use of Mask** – The mask defines the characters in *Commedia dell'Arte*. Each character is associated with a specific mask.
- **Use of Lazzi** – Lazzi are short comedic physical bits within the story, serving as moments that connect the character to the theme. Every *Commedia* actor had well-rehearsed lazzi for their character. For example, *Arclecchino*, a servant character, is always hungry. Lazzi for this character often revolved around food, or eating something not normally seen as food, such as a fly.
- **Use of Mime, Acrobatics, and Music** – All of these elements were used to enhance story and character.

The interaction between characters in Commedia dell'Arte often centers on battles for status and control. The character types—masters, servants, and lovers—provide ample opportunity for such conflicts. Some characters have status, some don't, and some will do whatever it takes to get it.

Characters in Commedia work in extremes: they are not just hungry, they are so hungry they'll eat anything; they don't just like money, they are obsessed with it. Their decisions can swing from an energy level of 1 to 100 and back again in a moment.

Commedia is an improvised form. Does that mean we can improvise dialogue in these plays?

These plays are not Commedia scripts in that they are not improvised scenarios. They are adaptations. The purpose of an adaptation is to take a work and make it suitable for a new purpose. In this case, the new purpose is a hybrid of two distinct forms. For me, the Commedia aspect of these plays lies in the characters and their portrayal: the characters are fixed, each has a specific need, there are status battles, and there are numerous opportunities for physical action!

Use these scripts as an opportunity to explore the character aspects of Commedia and character physicalization with your students.

The Stage Directions

I encourage and strongly suggest that you and your students read the stage directions. Normally, I'm a strong advocate for writers ensuring that everything they want presented on stage is in the text. If it's in the text, then it's integral to the character and the story. However, rules are meant to be broken, and in this case, the stage directions will provide your students with inspiration on how to physicalize the characters within a Commedia context.

For example, there are a number of lazzi in the script, entirely written in the stage directions. The physicality of the characters is an important element and might not always be apparent in the text alone. Can and should your students find their own interpretations? Absolutely! But the stage directions will give you a good starting point.

THE ANNIVERSARY

Characters

Andrey Andreyevitch Shipuchin: Chairman of the Norvik Joint Stock Bank.

Tatiana Alexeyevna: His wife.

Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin*: The bank's bookkeeper.

Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina: A persistent woman.

Deputation of Shareholders of the Bank: Extremely satisfied with the bank.

*In the original, Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin is named Kusma Nicolaievitch Khirin and is male.

Setting

The private office of the Chairman of the Bank. There is an exit leading to the public outer office. In the main room there are two desks: one for Khirin, the bookkeeper, and one for Shipuchin, the Chairman of the Bank. The decoration on the desks should reflect their character and jobs. Everything looks lush and is deliberately luxurious. There is velvet, flowers, statues, carpet, pictures.

Note

This play is all about money and status, both of which are extremely prevalent in Commedia scenarios. Money, a central theme in Commedia, is vividly explored here. Merchutkina wants it, Shipuchin uses it to show status, and Khirin uses it as a bribe to get what she wants. It all culminates in a moment of great physical character action!

Think about how each character embodies high, middle, or low status. Status is all about who has power and who controls the scene. This play presents an interesting dynamic: a character who doesn't have wealth but has all the status, and a character who typically would be high status but is not.

Merchutkina is not a typical Commedia master (vecchi) character, who holds power. However, she maintains high status from beginning to end. She never gives up and never lets someone who "seems" higher status gain the upper hand. She holds power.

Khirin is an example of a servant character (zanni) who lacks status and power but is extremely driven to get what she wants. This drive impacts her status, making her more dynamic.

Shipuchin should be high status, but he isn't. He occupies a middle status, needing to appease Tatiana, a master character who is high status all the way, while trying to assert power over Khirin and Merchutkina. His character constantly shifts in status, making it great to physicalize. Shipuchin never truly

wins: he doesn't get his way with his wife, and he definitely doesn't win against Merchutkina.

Tatiana, as a master character, consistently maintains high status, asserting her power and influence over Shipuchin, who finds himself navigating between these powerful personalities.

Physicalizing these status shifts and dynamics can add depth and humor to the performance, reflecting the essence of Commedia dell'Arte.

SHIPUCHIN's private office. KHIRIN is at the far side of the stage, yelling at someone in the outer office.

KHIRIN: (*calling out, nasty tone*) Someone get me some water! This is the hundredth time I've asked! The two-hundredth time! The millionth trillionth time! (*turns into the room*) Huh! (*yawns with a huge mouth*) I am so tired. (*yawns again with a huge mouth and arms*) This report has exhausted me beyond repair. (*yawns with a big mouth, arms, and shaking legs*) Drained! Depleted! Done!

She yawns and lets the yawn carry her to put her head on a nearby rolling chair. There is a loud snore. She is asleep. As she snores, she rolls herself over to her own desk, keeping her head on the seat of the rolling chair. She then uses a hand to pick up her head off the chair and moves herself to her own chair. Her head drops to her desk with a bang (safely, please). She sits right back up and groans as if her whole body aches.

Oh my legs. Ah my back. Oh my shoulders. (*grabbing different body parts*) Ahhhh I have a stitch! Ohhhh a spasm! Ahhhhh sciatica! Arthritis! Bursitis! Gout! Charley Horse!

Her head lands heavily on the desk again. There is noise and applause offstage.

SHIPUCHIN: (*voice*) Thank you! Thank you! I'm so grateful for this. You've done too much!

SHIPUCHIN enters backing up, bowing, addressing the outer office. He's holding a plaque.

SHIPUCHIN: I will treasure this expression of gratitude until the day I die. On my deathbed, the last thing I will say with my last breath is "thank you." I will treasure this beyond death! They will have to pry this plaque from my cold dead hands. (*beat*) Ha, ha, ha, ha! (*bowing*) Thank you! (*bowing lower*) Thank you so much. (*he's now kneeling on the ground*) This is the happiest day of my life! (*He now crawls backwards into the office. He turns and sees KHIRIN looking*

at him.) Oh! (*tries to leap up, shoulders back, the presentation of high status*) Hello, dear Yelena Nicolaevna!

KHIRIN: (*standing, not happy but not sarcastic*) It is an honour to congratulate you, Andrey Andreyevitch, on the fiftieth anniversary of our Bank.

SHIPUCHIN: (*all pomp*) Thank you! If I've had any success as Chairman of this bank, I must give credit where credit is due – to me! (*puts plaque on desk – it should stand like a picture frame would*) Where's the report?

KHIRIN: I've five pages left.

SHIPUCHIN: (*shoulders slump*) What? Not done! Whyyyyyy?

KHIRIN: It's a lot of work for one person.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: I didn't get enough sleep last night.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: My brain is swelling and I can't see straight.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: The world is on the brink of economic collapse. And you want me to finish a report? The nerve!

SHIPUCHIN: (*power!*) It has to be ready by three! If it's not, (*thinking, but not succeeding*) you'll... you'll... You'll be sorry.

KHIRIN: Really?

SHIPUCHIN: Yes! You will be... incredibly sorry.

KHIRIN: How so?

SHIPUCHIN: (*standing up straight, trying but really no good at this*) I will... I will... I will...

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) This should be good.

SHIPUCHIN: I will... I will... I will...

KHIRIN: Yes?

SHIPUCHIN: I will... dock your pay.

KHIRIN: You wouldn't dare!

SHIPUCHIN: (*slumping shoulders*) No I wouldn't. If you finish on time... I'll give you a bonus.

KHIRIN: (*now that is interesting*) A financial bonus? Money? Not like last time – pickled beets are not a bonus.

SHIPUCHIN: Beets are good for you. They can slow dementia.

KHIRIN: (*slamming the table*) Is it money or isn't it?

SHIPUCHIN: (*cowering a little*) Yes, ok, ok. Fine! A financial bonus.

KHIRIN: Fine. I'll keep at it. (*returns to work*)

SHIPUCHIN: (*turning to survey the office*) The general meeting is at four. This report, it's everything; it's my own personal firework! (*makes fireworks noises, uses his hands to gesture firework shapes*) I'll be promoted to the moon! (*takes a stapler off his desk and blasts it like a rocket ship*) All these excitements, gifts, standing ovations in my honour, it's such a whirlwind!

KHIRIN: (*trying to concentrate*) Two, carry the three, nine, seven...

SHIPUCHIN: (*looking at the plaque*) Isn't this nice? They're going to give me a big speech and a silver cup, too, at the general meeting.

KHIRIN: Carry the four, carry the eight, divide by two...

SHIPUCHIN: Of course, I wrote the speech and bought the cup. And told them to get the plaque. They never would have thought of it themselves.

KHIRIN: X minus Y plus thirty-two equals minus I. If x equals x minus I, when is Cheryl's birthday?

SHIPUCHIN: A certain pomp and circumstance is essential to a bank's reputation.

KHIRIN: If two trains are on the same track two hours apart and a fly is on the eastbound train traveling at 300 ft per minute, what is the colour of the westbound train?

SHIPUCHIN: Everything must look perfect. (*wipes the desk*) Flawless. Exquisite. (*polishes a knickknack*) Impeccable. Whatever it takes. (*looks around the office, sees the plaque in relation to a picture frame on the file cabinet*) Oh no. Oh no. This will not do.

The picture frame on the file cabinet and the plaque on the desk have to be far enough apart that SHIPUCHIN has to reach to the extreme to get to each.

Music plays. SHIPUCHIN sees that the picture frame on the file cabinet is crooked. He fixes it. He turns and now sees that the plaque on the desk is crooked. He fixes that. Now the frame on the file cabinet is crooked. He fixes that. He realizes he has to move both the plaque and the frame at the same time. He reaches out as far as he can with his hand to touch the picture frame. He tries to reach out with the other hand to get the plaque but it's too far. So, he reaches out with his hand to get the picture frame, and tries to reach out with his foot to get the plaque. Just when it looks like he might get it, he loses his balance and falls with a yelp. During all this, KHIRIN completely ignores him. Music fades.

SHIPUCHIN: (*staggering to his feet*) Really, Yelena Nicolaevna, don't you have a better jacket?

KHIRIN: Finishing this job is more important than my appearance, wouldn't you agree?

SHIPUCHIN: You look untidy.

KHIRIN: If the mayor shows up I'll hide in the closet.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA SHIPUCHIN enters with great swish and gesture. She poses. She is high status all the way.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Darling!

SHIPUCHIN: My treasure!

He goes to kiss her and she reacts vividly.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Not the face! Not the face!

SHIPUCHIN scrambles back and they air kiss. TATIANA poses again.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Did you miss me? Yes, you did, I know it. I haven't been home, I came straight from the station. There's so much to tell you, I couldn't wait! I'll only stay a minute. Good morning, Yelena Nicolaevna.

KHIRIN: (*ignoring her*) Seven, one, seven, two, seven, four...

SHIPUCHIN: Did you have a good time?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Splendid. Oh what a time! Mamma and Katya send their regards. Vassili Andreitch sends you a kiss. *(blows a kiss)* Oh, if you knew what happened. If you only knew! *(sitting)* Let me tell you.

SHIPUCHIN: *(scooping TATIANA back to her feet)* Darling, I do want to hear everything, but –

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Not the sleeves! Not the sleeves!

SHIPUCHIN: *(backing away)* It's the bank's anniversary, remember?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh, yes, the anniversary! Happy anniversary, bank! *(she laughs and sits again)*

SHIPUCHIN: *(tries to air-scoop TATIANA to her feet)* We may get a deputation of the shareholders at any moment, there's the meeting, the dinner, and you're not appropriately dressed.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(this is shocking)* Whaaaaaaat?

SHIPUCHIN: Don't get me wrong, you always look lovely!

KHIRIN: *(counting loudly)* Eight, four, three, one...

TATIANA tries to sit again and SHIPUCHIN furiously air-scoops her to her feet.

SHIPUCHIN: But I know you want to look your absolute best. For the bank. You must go home and get ready.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(moving away from SHIPUCHIN)* In a minute. There's so much to share, I'll talk quickly. We start on the train, I was sitting next to the most unpleasant –

KHIRIN: *(counting loudly)* Seven, one, seven, two...

SHIPUCHIN: *(trying to air-steer TATIANA to the door)* Tania, dear, you're disturbing Yelena Nicolaevna.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(deftly gets away from SHIPUCHIN)* She can listen and work at the same time, can't she?

SHIPUCHIN: I need this report before the general meeting.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: It's such an interesting story and it won't take a minute. So! Serezha came to meet me, and some young man turned up, a tax inspector I think...

Offstage voices start yelling "You can't! What are you doing? Get back here!"

MERCHUTKINA: (*offstage*) Don't you touch me! I'm going in!

MERCHUTKINA enters, waving her arms about, holding a piece of paper, and goes right up to SHIPUCHIN.

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: (*stumbling back, perhaps into a chair*) Oh!

MERCHUTKINA: (*towering over SHIPUCHIN*) I am the wife of a civil servant, Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina.

SHIPUCHIN: (*unsettled by her forward nature*) What do you want?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*looking at her sleeve*) Is that a crease? (*she focuses 100% on smoothing her sleeve*)

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency, my husband was ill for five months. FIVE! And while he was at home, getting better, as one should, he was suddenly dismissed. For no reason! (*She gives a very dramatic wail, perhaps collapsing onto SHIPUCHIN, who has no idea what to do. She suddenly draws back and continues on.*) And when I went to get his remaining salary, they said there was no money. NONE! Why? They said my husband already withdrew it! From his employee's account! And I said, how could he do that without my permission?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*she's finished smoothing*) There! Now, where was I?

MERCHUTKINA: I'm at my wit's end! It's all here.

MERCHUTKINA shoves a piece of paper, her petition, at SHIPUCHIN who has no choice but to take it.

SHIPUCHIN: Oh!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh! (*standing, moving to SHIPUCHIN*) Grendilevsky proposed to my sister. Can you believe it?

MERCHUTKINA: (*tugging on SHIPUCHIN's jacket*) Your Excellency! I'm a poor woman. I haven't two coins to rub together.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*pulling on the other side of SHIPUCHIN*) A nice, modest young man, but with no means of his own.

MERCHUTKINA: I haven't a purse to hold the coins I don't have.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: And wouldn't you know it, Katya is absolutely in love with him.

MERCHUTKINA: I haven't the strength to hold the purse to hold the coins I don't have! That's how poor I am!

KHIRIN: This is insufferable! I will scream!

She does so. It's long and extended. She takes a breath and continues screaming. Everyone reacts.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Yelena Nicolaevna. I am in the middle of a story.

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN*) Your Excellency! I am weak and defenseless!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN*) Andrey! Do something!

SHIPUCHIN: (*gestures and moves away*) Enough! How can I read with all this noise?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*taking the petition away from him*) Why are you reading anyway? You should be listening to me. You must hear this!

SHIPUCHIN: Tania, I want to hear it. Truly I do. (*thinking*) But my dear, I'm... I'm... I'm... (*pause*) I'm... I'm... I'm...

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) This should be good.

SHIPUCHIN: (*fast and quick*) I'm feeling a little dehydrated! (*now slow, it's the right idea*) I'm feeling a little dehydrated...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*genuine*) Oh! Don't you know how dangerous dehydration is? It's the primary cause of wrinkles. (*SHIPUCHIN gently takes back the petition*) You need water immediately! (*calling off*) I need water!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA sweeps out and SHIPUCHIN gives a little fist pump of success.

SHIPUCHIN: (*to MERCHUTKINA*) Madam, you've come to the wrong place. This is a bank. (*referring to the petition*) It says here your husband worked at the Army Medical Department. We can't help you.

SHIPUCHIN tries to return the petition to MERCHUTKINA, who refuses to take it.

MERCHUTKINA: (*moving away*) I've been there many times over the past five months. They won't talk to me, they won't look at my

petition. Last time, they threw me out into the street! Like this!
(she throws herself to the ground) Help me, your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: As I said, this is a bank. There's nothing we can do. Let me see you out.

SHIPUCHIN reaches down to try and help MERCHUTKINA up, who refuses to get up. No matter how hard SHIPUCHIN pulls, she stays on the ground. She plays as heavy as possible. Over the following, SHIPUCHIN ends up dragging her ungracefully along the floor toward the exit. With every step forward, MERCHUTKINA does everything she can to not be moved forward.

MERCHUTKINA: *(as she's being dragged)* I have a doctor's note.

SHIPUCHIN: Come now, Madam...

MERCHUTKINA: *(as she's being dragged)* It's five pages outlining my husband's every ache and pain.

KHIRIN: I can't concentrate.

MERCHUTKINA: *(as she's being dragged)* Eight pages with footnotes and bookmarks.

KHIRIN: I'll never finish at this rate.

MERCHUTKINA: *(as she's being dragged)* Twelve pages with seven appendices, a verified analysis and a very readable font.

KHIRIN: Enough! *(stands up and gathers her papers)*

SHIPUCHIN: What?

In surprise, SHIPUCHIN lets go of MERCHUTKINA who rolls away, also in surprise. When she comes to a stop, she starts looking through her purse, or pulling things out of her costume.

SHIPUCHIN: Where are you going?

KHIRIN: *(starts to exit)* I need quiet or my head will explode!

SHIPUCHIN: *(stopping KHIRIN)* No, no, you must stay at your desk. The office can't know there's an issue with the report!

MERCHUTKINA: *(finally pulling out her note)* Ah ha! Here it is!

KHIRIN: Give me an advance on my bonus.

SHIPUCHIN: What? Whyyyyyyyyyy?

KHIRIN: If you want me to finish on time...

MERCHUTKINA: (*moving to SHIPUCHIN*) Your Excellency, look!

SHIPUCHIN: I can't!

MERCHUTKINA: (*shoving the note at SHIPUCHIN*) Your Excellency!

KHIRIN: (*starts to exit again*) Then out I go!

SHIPUCHIN: (*pulling KHIRIN back into the room*) Sit down and I'll take care of it.

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excell –

SHIPUCHIN: (*interrupting*) Yes, yes, yes! Your husband is sick! I believe you. One hundred percent!

MERCHUTKINA: (*with quiet dignity*) You can't yell at me like that. I'm the wife of a civil servant.

SHIPUCHIN: Oh, I didn't mean, I really didn't mean to –

MERCHUTKINA: I can hardly stand. (*Pause. Then she collapses into a chair.*)

SHIPUCHIN: – it's just that so much is happening and –

KHIRIN: I'm leaving...

SHIPUCHIN: No, no, no, no, no, no don't leave.

MERCHUTKINA: (*feebly*) The only thing that will repair this damage to my heart and soul is that money...

*Offstage, we hear TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA's laugh.
SHIPUCHIN looks offstage.*

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*offstage voice*) Can you believe it? He proposed!

SHIPUCHIN: (*referring to TATIANA*) Oh! What if the shareholders come in and see that! (*back to the matter at hand*) Madam. I'm terribly sorry but I can't be more clear. This is a bank. We don't just give money to every person that asks for it.

MERCHUTKINA: (*zeroing in, no sign of feebleness*) In that case, your Excellency, you should order the Army Medical Department to pay me the money.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: (*holding out a hand*) Andrey Andreyevitch...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*offstage voice*) She's absolutely in love with him!

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: (*completely out of sorts*) Madam... report... anniversary... divorce papers to a flower shop! (*TATIANA laughs offstage*) You must excuse me.

KHIRIN: Where are you going?

MERCHUTKINA: (*getting in his way and grabbing on to SHIPUCHIN's arm*) Your Excellency, have pity on me, I'm an orphan! I'm defenseless! I lost my appetite! My parents never loved me!

SHIPUCHIN: I thought you were an orphan.

MERCHUTKINA: I'm an emotional orphan. This is triggering.

SHIPUCHIN: I'll be right back. Yelena Nicolaevna, please explain our situation.

SHIPUCHIN exits on the run and KHIRIN runs after.

KHIRIN: No! You're trying to get out of giving me my advance! This is the pickled beets all over again! I won't have it! (*turns back into the room*) Who are you? Huh?

MERCHUTKINA: (*scurrying away*) Ack!

KHIRIN: (*pursuing MERCHUTKINA*) What are you really doing here?

MERCHUTKINA: Oh! Help! I can hardly stand!

MERCHUTKINA groans loudly as she sways back and forth, looking around for a place to land. She topples into the rolling chair. She moves herself around the room, wailing on the chair, until KHIRIN finally grabs the chair.

KHIRIN: (*leaning over her*) Stop that wailing!

MERCHUTKINA stops on a dime.

KHIRIN: What do you want? Out with it!

MERCHUTKINA: (*sitting straight up*) 15 rubles now and the rest next month.

KHIRIN: (*pushing away the chair*) You think you're getting money from him? Ha!

MERCHUTKINA: (*holding out paper*) I have a doctor's note. In a readable font.

KHIRIN: I'm getting my advance. (*calling out*) Security! Come quickly!

MERCHUTKINA: (*calling out*) Security!

KHIRIN: You don't get to call for security. I'm the one who works here.

MERCHUTKINA: (*calling out*) This is tyranny! I'm being bullied! She's shaming my haircut! Security!

KHIRIN: (*calling out*) Security!

MERCHUTKINA: (*calling out*) Security!

KHIRIN: (*calling out*) Security!

SHIPUCHIN runs in.

SHIPUCHIN: What are you yelling for? What would happen if the shareholders came in and saw you behaving this way, Yelena Nicolaevna. Stop making a scene.

MERCHUTKINA: Ha!

KHIRIN: Unbelievable. (*returns to her desk and sits there, doing nothing*)

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA enters. SHIPUCHIN tries to get away from her but TATIANA is persistent. She follows SHIPUCHIN wherever he goes. MERCHUTKINA watches.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Darling, you ran off in the middle of my sentence. We spent the evening at the Berezhnitskys. Katya was wearing a sky-blue dress; silk, of course. She looked lovely, I did her hair myself.

SHIPUCHIN: (*on the move*) Yes, yes, darling...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Everyone was so taken with her, just as they used to be taken with me, which I truly understand. But still, I felt more than a little disrespected, let me tell you... (*looks at her nail*) Oh! Is that a chip? This won't do. (*sits, pulls out an emery board and fully focuses on her nail*)

SHIPUCHIN collapses into a chair and MERCHUTKINA pounces.

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: Ah! (*alarmed, leaping to feet*) Why are you still here?
(*crossing to KHIRIN's desk*) Yelena Nicolaevna...

KHIRIN: (*arms crossed*) Not my problem.

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN and spinning him around*) You must listen to me!

SHIPUCHIN: (*turning back around to KHIRIN*) Why aren't you working?

KHIRIN: Where's my advance?

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN and spinning him around*) Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: Now is not a good time. (*back to KHIRIN*) If you would just –

MERCHUTKINA: (*spinning SHIPUCHIN around*) If she gets money, I should get money.

SHIPUCHIN: Please leave! (*to KHIRIN*) Please get back to work.

MERCHUTKINA: As soon as I get my money.

KHIRIN: As soon as I get my advance.

SHIPUCHIN: (*shouting*) Enough!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*still focused on her nail*) Darling... shouting causes wrinkles...

SHIPUCHIN: I can't take it – I'm going to... I'm going to...

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) This should be good.

SHIPUCHIN groans and grabs his stomach and sinks to the floor.

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) Or not so good.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*satisfied*) Much better. Now, where was I?

SHIPUCHIN groans from the floor.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*standing*) Andrey, what are you doing on the floor? Is this any way for the chairman of a bank to act? Really, what if your shareholders saw you? (*to MERCHUTKINA*) What is happening here?

SHIPUCHIN groans from the floor.

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing TATIANA by the hands*) Beautiful lady, nobody will help me.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: The nails! The nails!

MERCHUTKINA actually backs off. She knows power when she sees it.

MERCHUTKINA: (*swanning back*) Beautiful lady, what can I do? My coffee tastes like dirt.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh that is awful. Darling, her coffee tastes like dirt. Such a disappointing start to the day. (*she pats MERCHUTKINA*) I'll get you a good coffee.

SHIPUCHIN groans from the floor. KHIRIN sees a moment and pushes MERCHUTKINA away to get in front of TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA.

KHIRIN: Madam! He made promises to me. He always makes promises and never follows through. Never, never, never!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Darling, you can't back out on your promises.

KHIRIN: He gave me pickled beets.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Beets are good for you. They're a proven anti-inflammatory, not that I am puffy in any way and needing any anti-inflaming, but some mornings, you look in the mirror and maybe you slept on your face wrong and the blood has pooled in an unattractive way – all you need is a demitasse of beet juice, which tastes dreadful but it's so worth it when the puff melts away. Not that it happens often but every woman knows the power of a good puff melt even though my sister has never –

Not being able to listen to this any longer, KHIRIN and MERCHUTKINA drag SHIPUCHIN to standing.

KHIRIN: (*at the same time as MERCHUTKINA below*) Andrey Andreyevitch!

MERCHUTKINA: (*at the same time as KHIRIN above*) Your Excellency!

KHIRIN and MERCHUTKINA verbally badger SHIPUCHIN about getting paid until he speaks.

SHIPUCHIN: Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine!! (*to MERCHUTKINA*) How much do you want?

MERCHUTKINA: 24 rubles 36 copecks.

SHIPUCHIN: *(takes out money)* Here's 25.

MERCHUTKINA: I thank you humbly, your Excellency.

KHIRIN: What about me?

SHIPUCHIN: Fine, fine, fine! Here. *(pays KHIRIN some money)* Now you *(referring to MERCHUTKINA)* go, and you, *(referring to KHIRIN)* get back to work!

SHIPUCHIN collapses into his desk chair. His head heavily hits the desk (safely). KHIRIN goes back to work. MERCHUTKINA puts the money away, but does not leave. TATIANA starts talking.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Well, that was easy. I'll just finish my story. What a time we had. So much fun, but nothing out of the ordinary. *(lifting SHIPUCHIN's head)* Darling are you listening? *(lets go of SHIPUCHIN, who slumps back onto the desk)* Katya's man was there of course, and as requested by Mama, I was to persuade Katya not to marry Grendilevsky. Which I completely agree with. Why should Katya be happy and in love? It isn't right. No one else in the world is happy, why should she get to be?

MERCHUTKINA: *(lifting SHIPUCHIN's head)* Your Excellency...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: She cried and I cried, but I convinced her that I was right and she was wrong.

MERCHUTKINA: *(holding SHIPUCHIN's face)* Your Excellency, if I could make another request?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(grabbing SHIPUCHIN's arm to wrench him to focus on her)* And then! Katya and I were walking along the avenue just before dinner when suddenly –

MERCHUTKINA: *(grabs the other arm to wrench SHIPUCHIN to focus on her)* Your Excellency!

Now both TATIANA and MERCHUTKINA are pulling SHIPUCHIN back and forth like a tug-of-war.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(pulls SHIPUCHIN)* A gunshot!

MERCHUTKINA: *(pulls SHIPUCHIN)* Can't my husband go back to his job?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(pulling)* Grendilevsky! I can't even!

MERCHUTKINA: *(pulling)* Your Excellency!



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